



commitment ~ community ~ connections

Privacy & Confidentiality Policy



The Winchester Public Library is dedicated to protecting the privacy and confidentiality of our patrons. Our policy complies with the Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 78, Section 7 (1994 edition):

“Part of the records of a public library which reveals the identity and intellectual pursuits of a person using such library shall not be a public record as defined by clause Twenty-sixth of section seven of chapter four.”

This policy extends to circulation records (borrowing records, registration records, reserves or fine records), interlibrary loan transactions, registration records, database search records and reference interviews. Except in cases involving the USA Patriot Act, no records can be made available to any inquiries, governmental or otherwise, unless a subpoena has been served by a court of competent jurisdiction and the library administration has consulted with legal counsel to determine if it is proper to release the requested information,

Our staff must support this policy of privacy and confidentiality; it is required by law and by the library’s long commitment to protecting a patron’s right to access information freely. In accordance with the law, the policy restricts our staff

from disclosing information to the cardholder’s family or friends. This applies to the release of information to the parents’ of minors when the minor has their own library card. The Supervisor of the Public Records of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Carolyn Kelly MacWilliam, stated in May 1997,

“A public library may not disclose records which reveal a minor’s borrowing information to the minor’s parent, regardless of whether the parent is paying the fine on an overdue item or the parent has signed the child’s library card application form.”



We hope the responses to the following questions will further clarify how privacy laws might affect your library visit:

Q. I am returning these library materials for my family member/friend. Can you tell me what is left on the card?

A. No, we cannot disclose any information about the account.

Q. I am returning these overdue library materials for my family member/friend. Can I pay the fine?

A. Yes, you can pay the fine on library materials you have *in hand*; but all other information related to the library card account is confidential.

Q. I know my family member/friend has fines, can I pay them?

A. No, even though it may be a nice gesture, one’s library card is confidential.

Q. I do not have my family member/friend’s card but s/he has

items out that need to be renewed. Can you renew them for me?

A. No, all transactions related to one's account are confidential.

Q. Can I pick-up my family member/friend's reserve?

A. Only if you have his/her card in hand. Without the card, our staff is unable to give you the reserve. It does not matter if you know what the item is (i.e. its title, the author or subject).



The following items cannot be used to pick-up a family member/friend's reserve:

- A note of permission
- A phone call of permission
- A library card number written on a piece of paper or memorized by heart
- Another book checked out on the account the reserve is placed on



Q. My Child is under the age of 18, don't I have the right to know the information related to his/her account?

A. No. A library card is confidential regardless of age or relationship.

Q. My spouse and I share everything, s/he would not mind if we had use of the same account. Please let me manage the account.

A. No. One's card is confidential regardless of relationship.

Q. I forgot my library card. Will I be able to pick up a reserve

item, take out library materials or manage my account?

A. Yes, as long as you have identification with a picture and current address, we can access your account. However, we cannot routinely accept identification in lieu of your card. The safest and most efficient way staff can serve you is with your library card, and presenting it is required.

Q. Can I renew library materials over the phone without my library card?

A. Once again, the easiest and most efficient way we can serve you is with your library card. We can renew a limited number of library items with its barcode number found either on the item or on the receipt. But without the library card number we cannot access the account itself.

To manage your account online, requires only your library card number and its Personal Identification Number (PIN). If you do not have a PIN, you can establish one online or ask the circulation staff to create one for you the next time you are at the library. We cannot assign you a PIN over the phone.

At times preserving confidentiality may be inconvenient. However, our democracy depends on the intellectual freedom privacy ensures. We will do our best to work with you. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated by the staff and the citizenry.

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